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Exploration and Discovery.

THE PRESENT AND POSSIBILITIES OF EXCAVATION IN PALESTINE.

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As representing the first extensive excavations in the land of the ancient Hebrew, the work of the Palestine Exploration Fund at Tell el Hesy, now with certainty identified with old Lachish, is interesting, not only because of the actual contributions to our knowledge, but as an index of what we may reasonably expect to find when other equally promising *tells* are laid bare. When it is remembered that Lachish appears to have been, during most of its Hebrew history, but a frontier fortress, the results are by no means discouraging. The January number of the *Quarterly Statement* of the Fund contains an extended résumé of the results of the excavations, carried on last spring, from Mr. Bliss, who has the work in charge. Operations were resumed March 28th and suspended May 26th. During this period the foundations of several interesting structures were laid bare. One of them, evidently, as indicated by the symmetry of the rooms, a public building, contained a room thirty by fifteen feet, which is remarkably large for a mud edifice. As a rule, however, the rooms were small. Two in the same building were only eleven by four feet. It is also an interesting fact, that the outer walls are uniformly about five feet six inches in thickness, varying from this mean never more than two or three inches. From the measurements Professor Petrie has concluded that the cubit used was the foot of 13.3 inches found in Asia Minor.

Among the other finds was a wine-press, or place for making the *dibs*, the grape treacle, which plays such an important part in the cuisine of the modern Syrian. Many types and forms of pottery ware were turned up; lamps and Phœnician bowls, probably dating from the thirteenth century; a great variety of bronze utensils and weapons; Egyptian cylinders; and—most valuable of all—the famous little inscribed cuneiform tablet. The genuineness of the latter can no longer be doubted. It was found in the debris of decayed brick and stone by one of the workmen, a simple-hearted lad of nineteen years, and handed over to Mr. Bliss while the fresh earth was

still clinging to the incised cuneiform letters. This proof is further corroborated by the testimony of Professor Sayce, who, from the nature of the contents, pronounces it undoubtedly genuine, and further publishes the text and his translation in the *Statement* (pp. 26 to 28).

We can well ask what are the contributions thus far from this *tell* of the Philistine plain to our meager knowledge of that life which is the background of the Old Testament history and literature?

It has introduced us to the homes of the ancient Hebrews, and we have been able to enter the mud residences of these dwellers of the plain and to know with certainty that neither the style of architecture nor material used has changed during the thirty intervening centuries. Further, our limited information respecting their domestic economy has been greatly increased. The very form of the clay dishes out of which they ate is known to us. The lamps which lighted their mud huts were of the low, pottery type, with the neck on one side, similar to those in use in the valley of the Nile. The rude bronze needles proclaim the trials of the ancient seamstress. Bronze, iron, silver and gold were the metals known to them, and these evidently in small quantities, the acquisitions of trade or conquest. For weapons the Hebrews were limited chiefly to flint and stone, and their rough arrow-heads and knives differ little from those of savage nations to-day. Only the earlier lords of the land, the Amorites, possessed bronze arrow-heads, knives and axes in abundance. The culinary department is represented by numerous pit ovens, or *tannûrs*, counterparts of the modern ovens of Palestine, while examples of the other type, now in use among the Lebanons, have been found. The latter is made of mud bricks, narrowing to a small aperture at the top, on which a pot can be placed. On the front there is a round opening which can be closed. When the fire at the bottom burns down to coals, dough is plastered on the inside to bake. Thus, doubtless, the ancient Hebrews made those thin, broad sheets of gray bread, such as the modern *fellah* rolls up in his wallet when he goes on a journey.

The little bronze images, and the still ruder little female figures in pottery, perhaps represent the teraphim, the household gods, which Rachel hid in the camel furniture, and which even so late and enlightened a prophet as Hosea counted as a necessity of the religious life.

Low as is the stage of civilization thus reflected, it seems to be a true picture of the home life of at least the great mass of the Hebrew nation. At the great cities foreign culture made its impression, but nothing has yet been discovered giving the slightest indication of an independent civilization or original art development. The finest bronze weapons thus far discovered are Amorite; the best specimens of pottery are all Phœnician; the little bronze images are Egyptian; the porcelain cylinders are Egyptian imitations of Babylonian models; even the systems of weights and measures in use appear to have been foreign; and the only real literary remains come from the earlier

Amorite times. The testimony of the Old Testament is the same. To build their palaces and even their central sanctuary the Hebrews must introduce foreign workmen. King Ahaz introduces new styles only as he copies Damascene models. The student, therefore, who sees in the Phœnician treasures from Mycenæ (now at Athens) the representative of that art which affected the Hebrews, especially of the royal period, is not far from the truth.

On the other hand there is a popular conception prevalent that the Hebrews were, on religious grounds, always bitterly opposed to all art representations. This is true from the time of the great reformation of Josiah on, and the hatred reaches its culmination in the Maccabæan age. The cause is patent. Art had been so perverted and was so closely associated with the hated idolatry, which was such a deadly menace to the true religion, that it came to be regarded with intense antipathy. The later development of Jewish thought presents many analogies. Perhaps the closest is that of the local sanctuaries, apparently common and universally recognized until about the same period, when they were placed under the heaviest bans.

Among the positive proofs that in early times the Hebrews had no objections to art representations might be cited the reference to Solomon's lion throne, 1 Kings x. 18. Over the holiest center of their worship, the ark, were the cherubim. Their possible imitation, the calves of Jeroboam I, set up at Dan and Bethel, duplicated at Gilgal and Samaria, and probably at many other sanctuaries, were openly denounced by no prophet before Hosea. From the reference in 2 Kings xvi. 17, it appears that the brazen oxen supported the great sea in the temple unmolested, until the time of Ahaz, who instituted a change because of a personal fancy rather than from religious motives. It is as significant as it is surprising that these allusions, to be sure, limited chiefly to the prophetic record, have escaped the shears of later editors who regarded art with no favorable eye. Other indications are by no means lacking. For example, Proverbs speaks of a worker in carved works. Hence we are justified in concluding that while the Hebrews were characterized by a lack of originality, which was probably, as we shall see, in the department of art intensified by the absence of suitable materials at hand, yet there was, during the earlier and major portion of their history, no antipathy, but rather a love, for the beautiful, expressed in objective form. Therefore there is every reason for expecting that the *tells* of Palestine, especially those of the large cities, will yield art treasures, interesting for their association, if not native to Canaan. The little bronze man and goat found at Lachish is an earnest that we shall yet look upon some of those molten images, the work of man's hands, which so sorely tempted those early people, and called forth the withering sarcasm and thunders of the Hebrew prophets.

A question, to the excavator even more vital, is, what literary remains may he expect to find in these same *tells*? Its answer involves the greater and even more complicated question of how far writing was known among the

ancient Hebrews. The subject is certainly worthy of more exhaustive treatment than it has yet received, for the light that it throws on higher critical questions, but I will here attempt to give only a few suggestions. The earliest date given to a Phœnician inscription is about 1000 B. C. (Baal Libnan text). This date is doubtful, but accepting it and the fairly well established conclusion that the old Hebrew alphabet came from Egypt through the Phœnicians, the question arises whether the Hebrews were acquainted with this script before the reign of David at the earliest.

The references in the Biblical narrative to writing are suggestive, even though they may show the influence of their late authorship. "Samuel (1 Sam. x. 25) told the people the manner of the kingdom and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the Lord." "David (2 Sam. xi. 14, 15) wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah." Jezebel wrote letters (1 Kings xxi. 8) in Ahab's name. Jehoram read a letter from the king of Syria, and Jehu (2 Kings v. 5-7) wrote letters to the rulers of Jezreel. In all these cases the Hebrew word used is "Sepher," which comes from a common Semitic root meaning to scrape or scratch. Perhaps in its original meaning it may favor the idea of a tablet cut with some instrument, but the term is later applied to rolls upon which the letters were written with a pen. The same term appears in the famous Kirjath-Sepher, or "Book-town," in which Professor Sayce expects to find the famous Canaanitish library. If the hypothesis of a library is correct it was pre-Israelitish, since there are no indications that it was a repository of Hebrew literature. In the light of the recent finds it would therefore refer to a cuneiform library. Hence with these facts before us there is no valid reason why "Sepher" could not refer to an inscribed cuneiform tablet, and there are positive grounds for believing that originally such was its use. Other references to writing among the Hebrews might be cited, as for example, 2 Chron. ii. 11, which speaks of the correspondence of Hiram of Tyre with Solomon, but it is needless to multiply examples. One reference, however, Judges viii. 14, which seems to belong to an old document, is significant. It tells us that a boy of Succoth, captured by chance, is able to write down the names of the seventy-seven princes and elders of the city. If the Hebrews became masters of the land of Canaan, as appears probable, not only by actual conquest, but also by a process of extensive assimilation with the children of the land, one questions whether the wide knowledge of the cuneiform, betrayed by recent finds, suddenly vanished from off the face of the earth, or whether it is not much more reasonable to hold that it was adopted by the non-original and imitative Hebrews, and thus handed down.

There is no reason for doubting but that there was some historical basis for the many allusions in the different books to writing at an early date in Israel's history. That the script employed was the Phœnician is nowhere postulated, and hence the argument against the existence of a knowledge of writing

based on the ground that this was not known in Israel before at least 900 B. C., falls completely. If, on the other hand, it is a fact, as a certain German scholar claims he can demonstrate, that the cuneiform continued to be the commercial writing of the Semitic world long after the exile, there is no reason for not supposing that it was known and employed by the Hebrews even after the Phœnician appeared on the field. There are indications that possibly this explains not a few hitherto obscure allusions. One will suffice. To Isaiah (viii. 1) the command comes to announce to his countrymen his message, which itself suggests to the student several familiar Assyrian roots, by writing it upon a tablet with the pen of a man. The word for the tablet, which the prophet is to take, occurs only in this passage. Its primary meaning is something clean, smooth, therefore a polished metal or stone surface. He is not to write with a pen such as was commonly employed in writing the Phœnician script upon papyrus, but he is to use a "Heret," chisel. This word is found elsewhere only in Ex. xxxii. 4, where it is the name of the tool used by Aaron in fashioning the molten calf. This peculiar expression "pen of a man," or, more literally, "chisel of common humanity," evidently does not refer to some particular language or dialect, as it is sometimes explained, but to the kind of script. The tablet and chisel strongly suggest the cuneiform. If the latter was also the earlier and thus known to all, and, further, at this time the script of the business and diplomatic world, the force of this puzzling phrase is at last explained. In characters intelligible to even the common people would then plainly refer to the characters of the Tell el Amarna tablets. The above hypothesis has been suggested by an inductive study of the texts. Whether it be accepted or not the fact remains that during the greater part of Hebrew history the art of writing was not only known but commonly employed.

Unfortunately the probability of finding some of these bits of ancient literature depends not only upon whether there was writing, but also upon the character of the material upon which it was inscribed. It must ever be a source of regret that the Hebrews had neither the plastic clay which exposure to the sun made so durable, nor the soft alabaster of the Assyrians, upon which to inscribe their records. Papyrus (species of which grows wild in Palestine) seems to have been the material in common use. Contrary to the general belief, the use of leather for this purpose appears to have been a late discovery. For immortalizing their thought in monumental form, the land of Canaan contributed only marl, crystalline limestone and basalt, materials neither durable nor easy to work. Of the three the latter is the best, but is not found in Judah at all. The Siloam inscription is cut in hard dolomitic stone, chased with a fine tool and then finished carefully. It is also interesting to know that the Tell el Hesi tablet is not of baked clay, but of a very hard, fine stone of a blackish-brown color. Therefore, in art and for monumental purposes, the Hebrews were limited largely to imported

materials, precious stones, ivory, bronze and gold. The reference in Deut. xxvii. 2 to the use of stones plastered with plaster as a basis for the inscription both suggests an incised cuneiform text, and indicates that the lack was deeply felt. Exodus xxviii. 9-11 speaks of the use of two onyx stones (on the ephod), upon which the names of the tribes are to be engraved with the engraving of a signet. The term signet reminds one at once of the cartouches from the valleys of the Nile and Euphrates. It is also interesting to note that the verb used in each case is the common Assyrian word (*patahu*) meaning to dig, to engrave. In the 36th verse of the same chapter, the same kind of engraving is referred to. The material in this case is a plate of pure gold. In this paucity of suitable material is perhaps to be found the explanation of what is practically established as a fact, namely, that the Hebrews did not, like the Egyptians, put inscriptions upon the tombs of their dead.

If on *a priori* grounds the outlook is discouraging, yet there is encouragement in the results which have rewarded the very limited research of the past. If the rude Moabites of the ninth century could rear such a monument as the inscription of king Mesha, the Hebrews, who were, not only in the light of their own records, but also of the Assyrian monuments, on a much higher plane of civilization, must have left behind some lasting literary remains which we shall yet see. Of this the beautifully executed Siloam text is a token. If, further, as we have good reason to believe, the cuneiform was the early script, the possibilities are infinitely multiplied, since this calls for a durable material. As one thinks of the many *tells* of Palestine and of what they may contain, the question involuntarily arises, "How long must we wait?"